

# Girls shouldn't fear going into trades, says mentor

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By Carol Sanders

A JOURNEYMAN machinist who hadn't held a hammer until she was in her 20s told hundreds of Grade 8 girls Thursday she's proof that achieving any career is possible.

"I thought I was going to be a secretary," said Georgette Lang, who took part in a day-long workshop to introduce girls to careers in trades and technology.

Now, she has her machinist's ticket, owns her own custom machine shop and is an apprenticeship co-ordinator for the provincial government. She was one of the mentors at the conference Thursday at Red River College.

Lang said after her parents split up, she was raised by her mom and had no exposure to the trades or career guidance. She worked at a warehouse as a labourer until she was laid off.

Lang said she was given an opportunity for retraining in trades and jumped at it.

She went back to school then worked for others before starting her own company. Today, she manufactures parts for railways, window manufacturers and a company that makes magnetic resonance imaging machines and surgical tables.

"I make a product and I can see what I make," said Lang. She said her trade requires someone who's good with their hands and can work independently.

The girls who applied to attend the day-long conference asked her questions like how much a journeyman machinist makes, how she is treated in a male-dominated industry and if she's ever been hurt on the job.

Lindsay Probert, who attends Chief Peguis Junior High School, said she was interested in carpentry, and has a good influence.

"My grandfather's a carpenter and he plays a big role in my life... he's redone our entire house."

Lindsay may get some help if she decides to enrol in an apprenticeship program. On the day she took part in the conference, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced a new grant program that will pay cash to Canadians who take apprenticeship programs.

The program, first announced in the last federal budget, offers apprentices up to \$4,000 by the time they graduate, a significant increase from past grant programs.

"Demand for tradespeople, for skilled workers, still remains very strong in this country, notwithstanding the recession," Harper told a news conference Thursday.

"Business knows that they are still going to need a lot of skilled apprentices and tradespeople and that's in the very near future."

Encouraging more apprenticeships will help Canadians



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## Flower power

Kerri Richards of RB Russell Vocation High School participates in the florist division of the Skills Manitoba Competition at Red River College.

weather the global recession because it improves both job prospects and earning potential, he said.

An estimated 20,000 people could benefit from the grant program, according to a government news release.

Apprentices can start applying for the grants in July, but the program is retroactive to Jan. 1.

—with file from Canadian Press